

Christmas Eve tradition continues at restaurant

By ARMANDO RIOS JR.
Staff Writer

Christmas Eve in San Angelo means a free Christmas dinner at Joe's Park Restaurant for senior citizens and those with disabilities.

What has come to be a holiday tradition began 13 years, Park said as he and other volunteers cleaned up Monday after the Christmas Eve meal.

About 300 people came to visit and eat at the restaurant at 2821 N. Chadbourne St.

"We had a terrific time over here," Park said. "We had mariachi singers, two groups singing for the folks, and they just loved it."

The people seemed very thankful for the annual tradition, he said.

"This makes Christmas for everybody," he said. "When I started I wanted to do something for the community. Doing a dinner was what I felt I could do. It has turned into a big deal. Some folks don't have any Christmas at all, aside from this meal."

Each year bring some familiar faces, seen only once a year because the folks are not able to go out that much. "I get to see them on Christmas Eve, so that is really nice," Park said.

Preparations started Saturday.

"Everything is pretty well worked out so when today rolled around all I had to do was get it up here, warm it up and we were ready to go," he said.

The holiday meal would not be possible without restaurant employees and friends who volunteered, Park said.

The majority of the diners were from San Angelo, although several came in from out of town.

"We had some who said they were from Dallas," Park said. "They were visiting here in town and popped in and had dinner with us. They enjoyed themselves and were real happy."

Diners ate ham steak with pineapple glaze, yams, green beans, rolls and ice cream, while Santa strolled around.

"This makes my Christmas, seeing seniors come in and sit down to a dinner that somebody has invited them to," Park said. "That makes my Christmas, I don't need anything else."

The restaurant will be closed today, but will reopen on Wednesday.

Park planned to spend the remainder of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day at home.

"This was my big celebration right here," he said.



Manuel Herrera, Jesse Garza and Ernest Perez of Los Bohemios (from left) perform at Joe's Park Restaurant Monday during a free Christmas Eve lunch for the elderly and those with disabilities. The affair has become a tradition for Joe's Park since it started in 1977.

Bishop will lead Christmas services

Bishop Michael Pfeifer of the Catholic Diocese of San Angelo will lead San Angeloans in prayers for peace as they celebrate Christmas today.

A Christmas Mass for peace in the world, especially in the Persian Gulf area, will begin at 11:45 a.m. at Our Lady of Peace Church, Goodfellow Air Force Base. This Mass also will be offered for members of the Armed Forces serving in the Middle East.

Monday morning, Pfeifer visited Tom Green County Jail inmates and led a Mass to commemorate the holiday. Later in the day, he also celebrated the Solemn Pontifical Christmas Midnight Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Door decoration winners named

Winners have been named in the River Oaks Nursing Care Center door-decorating contest.

The first-place decoration, on Smokey Huff's, Emma Young's door, and second place, on Gertrude Prior's door, both went to Gandy's Dairies. The third place winner, on Willie Fuller's and Bertha Sanders' door, was decorated by the Retired Senior Volunteer Program.

S-T photo by Mike Howell